

# Maneuver and other Missions in OIF 1-37 FA 3/2 SBCT

By Lieutenant Colonel Steven A. Sliwa

1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery (1-37 FA), the FA battalion assigned to the Army's first Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), conducted combat operations in Iraq from November 2003 to October 2004. The deployment of 3d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division (2/3 SBCT) to Iraq was the first operational deployment of an SBCT to combat.

During this yearlong effort in Iraq, 1-37 FA conducted many operations in support of the brigade—conducting counterfire and civil military operations (CMO), securing key assets, processing detainees, training the Iraqi National Guard as well as conducting maneuver operations in 1-37 FA's battlespace. The battalion proved flexible and capable of meeting the demands and preserved options for the brigade commander by serving as an economy-of-force maneuver unit.

Just as other FA battalions before and FA battalions currently serving in a maneuver task force (TF) role in Iraq, 1-37 FA had to grow in terms of honing new skill sets, deliberately reorganizing its structure and preparing for many unknowns. Most challenging for the battalion and its leadership was serving in the role of infantry—maneuvering and controlling an area of operations. But, like other FA units, 1-37 FA proved it was fully capable of serving in this capacity.

**Tough Decisions and Breaking New Ground.** During the final months of preparation for deployment, the battal-



Soldiers from 1-37 FA train at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Endurance at Qayarah West Airbase, Iraq.

(Photo by SPC Gretel Sharpee, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

ion conducted a mission analysis and created a training plan to set up the batteries and Soldiers for success. Immediately, we established communications with FA battalions in Iraq to harvest current tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) and enemy trends, building a better understanding of the operating environment and the unique missions being performed by fellow Red-legs. This was a “real-time” source of data from the theater and the basis of our training.

We altered the current battalion mission-essential task list (METL) and focused resources on skills that previously had not been at the forefront (see Figure 1). Additionally, the task of massing battalion fires was eliminated from training plans. We realized that, given the small-unit decentralized operations in Iraq, it was unlikely there would be a demand for massed fires or that the three batteries would be in position and ready to fire simultaneously. Instead, the battalion ensured each firing battery was proficient in providing fires. The battalion also developed standing operating procedures (SOP) for small-unit dismounted military operations in urban terrain (MOUT).

Then the battalion focused on individual and small-unit tasks to bring Soldiers to a new level of confidence in weapons proficiency and battle drills that platoons and batteries could execute in support of the missions *we thought* we would be assigned. The batteries were organized into flexible organizations consisting of two platoons (built by dividing the four, 10-man howitzer sections) and a headquarters detachment (created from the fire direction center, or FDC, and remaining battery personnel).

Another tough decision for 1-37 FA was to train without all its assigned equipment to have additional high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) modified into “Special Forces-like gunships.” This later would prove to be one of the best moves we made; these vehicles were the mainstay of our force and operations.

Finally, we had to change the mindset of the battery leadership and Soldiers. This was challenging as we had no way to plan and rehearse for specific missions before deploying. Both the brigade and battalion missions were unclear. For example, not until 3/2 SBCT had conducted operations in theater did we know we would replace the 101st

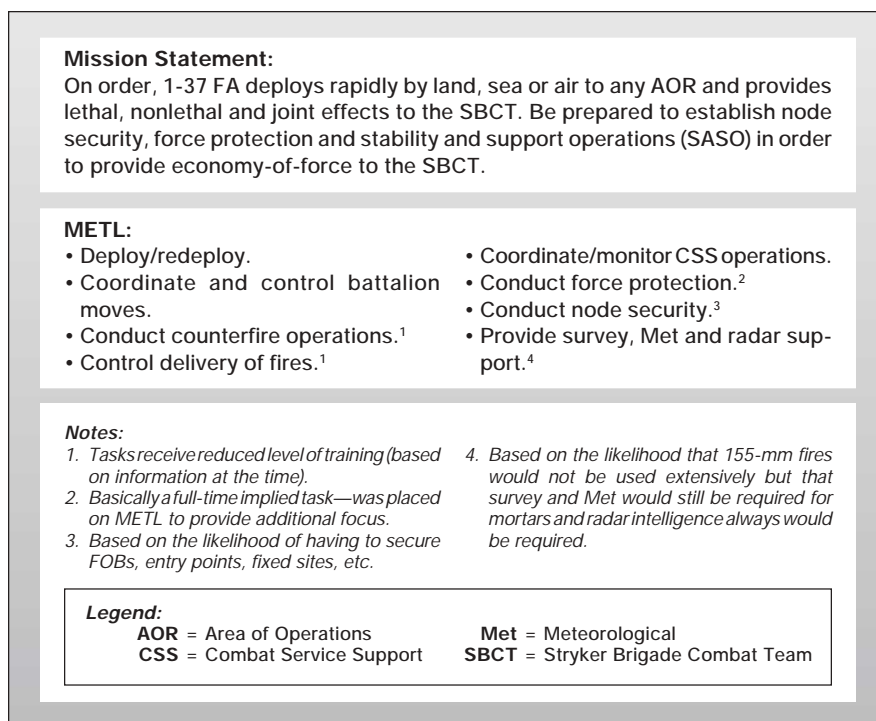


Figure 1: 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery (1-37 FA) Modified Mission Statement and Mission-Essential Task List (METL) Approved July 2003. The last three tasks in the METL were added for deployment training.

Airborne Division (Air Assault). Based on our analysis and feedback from units in Iraq, we took a very broad approach to training on dismounted skills to cover a spectrum of potential operations.

**Operation Arrowhead Blizzard in Samarra.** The unit’s first combat experiences were during Operation Arrowhead Blizzard in Samarra. 3/2 SBCT conducted operations with the 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry. During this operation, TF 1-37 FA conducted a myriad of tasks in support of the brigade. (See Figure 2.)

C Battery task organized with sappers from C/1092 EN and constructed and operated a forward detainee-processing center to relieve the forces operating in Samarra of the task of processing and transporting detainees. Using its firebase construction skills, the battery established a small strongpoint on the outskirts of Samarra that also provided security for several retransmission teams and a forward medical treatment facility.

The task force provided 24/7 route security along the two major lines of communication (LOCs) that led from the brigade base of operations on Forward Operating Base (FOB) Pacesetter, approximately 35 kilometers from Samarra. B Battery secured the northern route using our HMMWV gunships.

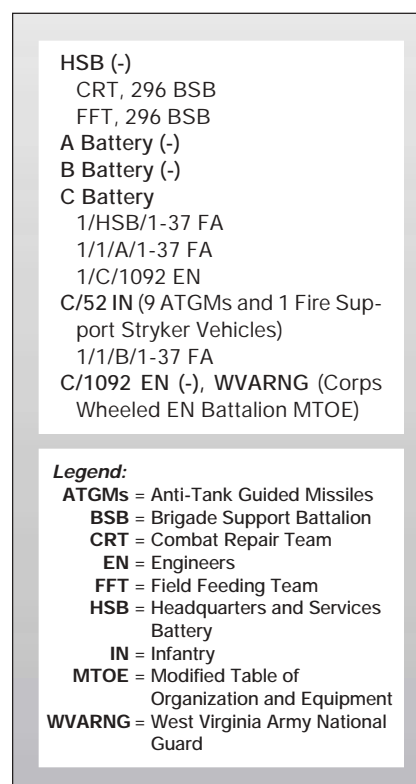


Figure 2: Task Force (TF) 1-37 FA Task Organization—Samarra. The key tasks in Samarra were to provide counterfire; secure lines of communications (LOCs) to Samarra from FOB Pacesetter; hold, process and transport detainees; and provide a FOB quick-reaction force (QRF).



Equipped with the anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) variant of the Stryker vehicle, C/52 IN secured the more dangerous southern route. C/52 IN was tasked-organized with a howitzer section from B Battery for greater haul capacity for barrier materials to construct traffic control points (TCPs). The section also provided the additional men required for this mission.

A Battery provided a 6400-mil firing capability on FOB Pacesetter. Three platoons of two howitzers were laid and set on different azimuths to decrease shift time. The FDC directed the platoon to the required set of howitzers during fire missions.

This paid off one night as rockets attacked the FOB. The Q-36 Firefinder radar, also located on the FOB, acquired the attack, and A Battery executed counterfire, preventing 21 additional rockets from being fired at the FOB.

The missions during this phase of the battalion's deployment were marked by dispersed and independent operations at the battery and company level. Command and control was challenging but made easier via the use of Force XXI battle command brigade and below (FBCB<sup>2</sup>).

As a new maneuver commander, I relied on my observations of the brigade commander during many training events and my experiences as a fire support officer (FSO) at the company, battalion and brigade levels to lead the operations. I positioned myself forward at the detainee site because it allowed me to best influence the majority of the task force. This was a departure from the traditional positioning I had experienced—"snaplinked" to the brigade commander.

**Mosul and Relief in Place (RIP) with the 101st.** After operations in Samarra, the brigade moved north away from the Sunni Triangle and executed an RIP with the 101st Division. The SBCT took over the battlespace of a division and was stretched across an area approximately 137 miles by 165 miles. In other terms, our 5,000 troops replaced the 25,000 troops in the division and its attachments.

As 1-37 FA arrived in Mosul, its mission was yet to be assigned, based on the complexities of the RIP with the 101st. Analyzing the area of responsibility (AOR) and the capabilities of his units, the brigade commander did not assign a mission to 1-37 FA until late

HQs Plt/HHC 5-20 IN\*  
LST, 296 BSB  
445 CAT, CAARNG  
136 THT, 1-14 Cav, 3/2 SBCT (DS)  
333 THT, 310 MI Bn (DS)  
335 THT, 310 MI Bn (GS) (TACON)  
C/52 IN (9 ATGMs and 1 Fire Support Stryker Vehicles)  
C/1-14 Cav (9 Reconnaissance, 2 Mortar, 1 Fire Support and 1 Medical Evacuation Stryker Vehicles)  
C/276 EN (-), VAARNG (DS) (Corps Wheeled EN Battalion MTOE)  
102d ING Battalion (OPCON)

\*5-20 IN provided convoy security from April through June 2004.

#### Legend:

CAARNG = California Army National Guard  
CAT = Civil Affairs Team  
Cav = Cavalry  
DS = Direct Support  
GS = General Support  
HHC = Headquarters and Headquarters Company  
ING = Iraqi Army National Guard  
LST = Logistic Support Team  
MI = Military Intelligence  
OPCON = Operational Control  
Plt = Platoon  
SBCT = Stryker Brigade Combat Team  
TACON = Tactical Control  
THT = Tactical Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Team  
VAARNG = Virginia Army National Guard

Figure 3: TF Sykes—Qayarah. The task force's key tasks were to secure the area of operations (AO), command and control (C<sup>2</sup>) the FOB at Qayarah West Airbase, train Iraqi Army National Guard and secure Ammunition Supply Point (ASP) Jaguar.

into the RIP. This proved challenging for the battalion. However, our earlier experiences with ambiguity allowed us to remain "steady in the harness" and focus on improving force protection to vehicles and Soldier living areas.

1-37 FA's assignment eventually became securing a large area of operations (AO) encircling Mosul (approximately 1,700 square miles). This allowed the brigade commander to place his infantry battalions in Mosul and establish an economy-of-force on the outer periphery of the city.

TF 1-37 FA was quartered in Mosul and maneuvered through the city to get to anywhere in the AO. This built a unique proficiency among the platoons that navigated daily in the built-up terrain.

C Battery had the mission to secure FOB Freedom, the home of the brigade headquarters and TF Olympia, the brigade's higher headquarters. C Battery maintained this security mission until the battalion redeployed.

During this phase of the operation, TF 1-37 FA reorganized, losing C Battery and some engineers and gaining a target acquisition battery (TAB) (A/151 TAB) from the Minnesota Army National Guard. In Mosul, TF 1-37 FA secured the AO and a large fuel transport point, built Iraqi institutions, mentored the Iraqi Police and facilities protection services force (FPSF), and improved the Iraqi infrastructure.

It was in this phase that 1-37 FA gained its "sea legs" in conducting "cordon and knocks" as well as combined operations with the Iraqi Police. Additionally, the battalion standard was to conduct dismounted patrols and "flash" TCPs during every mission in the AO to increase both maneuver proficiency and our local presence. During these operations, 1-37 FA captured weapons dealers, counterfeiters and several arms caches and responded to a number of fights within the battlespace.

1-37 FA also prosecuted an intensive CMO campaign to build up the legitimacy of 10 Iraqi city councils as the country approached Transfer of Sovereignty. Based on the lack of civil affairs teams (CATs), Redleg officers executed the CA tasks.

In Mosul, the battalion's depth of leadership was put to the test. Due to a unique tailoring of forces and personnel shortages, I left TF 1-37 FA in the capable hands of the battalion executive officer (XO), Major Rodney L. Olson, to take command of TF Sykes for six weeks. This TF was at FOB Regulars (later named Endurance) at Qayarah West Airbase, approximately 45 miles south of Mosul. The assignment included a battlespace of about 6,360 square miles (slightly larger than Connecticut).

TF Sykes was a unique TF (see Figure 3) consisting of units that remained in the vicinity of Qayarah. Its parent headquarters (5-20 IN) was successfully executing convoy security operations to reopen LOCs south of Balad and Baghdad previously interdicted by the enemy.

This was an awesome task—a Redleg commanding a TF with an *ad hoc* staff and no FA units. Additionally, I had one Iraqi National Guard (ING) battalion

under the operational control (OPCON) of the TF. I relied on my experiences gained during operations in the periphery of Mosul and placed my faith in the staff and units that had a thorough knowledge of the AO as I became familiar with the AO and situation.

I matured during this experience, in terms of decision making. This situation forced me to rely on sound reasoning linked to plans and operations because I was not familiar with the personalities, talents, strengths or weaknesses of the commanders, staff or Soldiers in the task force. Learning to live outside of one's comfort zone can be taxing, but, in the end, it was very worthwhile.

**Change of Mission and Link Up.** In June, 1-37 FA handed over its AO around Mosul to two Infantry battalions and moved south to Qayarah where I was already in command. The brigade had accomplished its security and CMO tasks in Mosul and shifted its effort to secure a new AO and train and integrate the ING. This would be the final set for TF 1-37 FA in an AO the size of Rhode Island (see the task organization in Figure 4).

Conditions in the Tigris River Valley and the vicinity of the FOB became more challenging and dangerous as TF 1-37 FA arrived. The situation required the task force to execute many cordon and knocks and cordon and searches, conducting many with the ING forces it had trained.

Other missions included securing a mass gravesite in the vicinity of Al Hadr. This site was where large numbers of Kurds were systematically murdered. It was identified as a crime scene that could provide evidence against Saddam Hussein. We also secured a large former Iraqi ammunition storage point, where munitions were being destroyed by US contractors, and the brigade's retransmission site.

Notwithstanding the offensive operations mentioned earlier, one of the most demanding missions was conducting ING training. The TF trained two and one-half battalions of ING on the FOB. During one of its most intensive training periods, the TF trained 13 platoons of ING on the FOB while meeting its other security and operational requirements.

Additionally, force protection of the FOB remained challenging. Responsibility for protecting the FOB with two task forces and many US and Iraqi per-

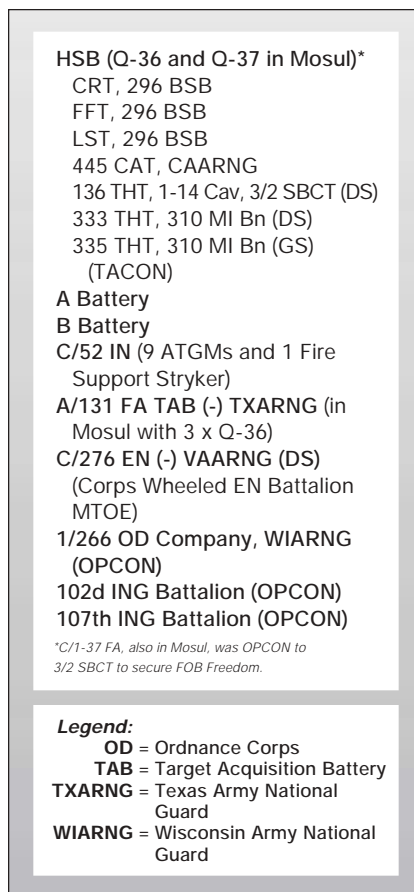


Figure 4: TF 1-37 FA—Qayarah. The task force's key tasks were to secure the AO; command and control FOB Qayarah West Airbase; train ING; secure the brigade retransmission site, ASP Jaguar and a mass grave site in the vicinity of Al Hadr; integrate ING into combined operations; and be prepared to provide fires.

sonnel kept the command and staff fully employed and ever vigilant.

**Relief in Place.** In October 2004, 2-8 FA, 1/25 SBCT, replaced 1-37 FA. 2-8 FA conducted a unique mission-for-mission exchange. It deployed with only its personnel and individual weapons and gear and fell in on 1-37 FA's equipment.

Before 2-8 FA deployed, we established communications with the battalion and transferred TTPs and knowledge of the battlespace and missions. This allowed 2-8 FA to prepare with a greater focus back at Fort Lewis. The battalion arrived aggressive, confident and fit—the torch was passed to another outstanding FA battalion.

On 3 November 2004, 1-37 FA returned to Fort Lewis with all its Soldiers. With the battalion's capabilities fully realized, the brigade conducted a final after-action review (AAR) and reviewed the battalion's METL. 1-37 FA's

METL, including maneuver tasks, was confirmed and approved (see Figure 5 on Page 14).

**Lessons Learned.** I learned several lessons that may be helpful for other units deploying to Iraq.

**Force Protection.** This is everyone's business and needs the leaders' constant attention. There is always some way to improve the protection or safety of Soldiers—where they eat and sleep or how they operate.

One goal of 1-37 FA was to place Soldiers where they could sleep relatively assured of safety. As I learned from a fellow battalion commander, sleep is a "weapon" and is key to better performance. Our goal was to put Soldiers under concrete, whenever possible, or under sand bags, often sacrificing comfort for protection.

The availability of funds and other resources allowed for creative force protection measures. Concrete and steel obtained locally often provided extra protection to positions and vehicles.

The leadership must inspect daily and maintain discipline to continuously improve the level of force protection. The unit must follow through with vigilance and never lose momentum by giving in to a "good enough" attitude.

The chain of command must challenge Soldiers to offer their ideas for force protection; many of our best ideas came from young Soldiers who thought of methods to improve force protection.

**Effects Coordinator (ECOORD) versus TF Commander.** During operations in Iraq, balancing the responsibilities as the ECOORD and TF commander was challenging. I quickly learned that at the pace of operations on that distributed battlefield, the deputy effects coordinator (DECOORD) could handle the mission with limited oversight the majority of the time.

This was a dramatic change from what I experienced at the training centers. However, I believe that, at the lower end of the spectrum, the FA commander can make more of a difference as a TF commander than by serving the *same time* only as the ECOORD.

**Every Move is a Combat Operation.** You must plan, resource and battle drill every move to ensure the safety of everyone in the convoy. Pre-combat checks/pre-combat inspections (PCCs/PCIs) are a *must*. Criteria for success must be met before the move. Soldiers must be empowered to identify deficiencies without the fear of repercus-

sions to maintain a positive program of success.

*Cultural Awareness and Understanding.* 1-37 FA's understanding of the Iraqi culture never got very deep—despite working closely with Iraqis by mentoring mayors and city councils and training and joint operations with the ING. No unit can spend the amount of time it takes to really understand the complex and unique peoples in its AO (tribes, religion, etc.).

To improve understanding, units should employ interpreters not only during operations, but also as language teachers in classes. The focus should be on key words and phrases Soldiers are likely to encounter or will require during operations. Often we relied solely on interpreters and assumed the additional risk of our Soldiers not truly understanding. Additionally, interpreters can be outstanding instructors of the culture in a given AO or of Iraqis in general.

*Weapons Proficiency.* Confidence in weapons is a *must*. Soldiers must be proficient in their weapons and capable on all other weapons. This is gained through ranges, close quarters marksmanship (CQM) and hands-on operations. Weapons proficiency and proper clearing procedures prevent accidental discharges and minimize risk to the force.

*ING Training and Integration.* Work-

ing closely with Iraqi security forces is challenging and takes patience and flexibility. As relationships develop, trust is best built through the actions of both US forces and the Iraqis.

It is easy for those working closely with Iraqis to become frustrated and tired over time due to the language barrier, the levels of competence of the Iraqis in their new roles and missions, and cultural differences. Those who train or liaise with Iraqis must be rotated on a schedule that does not sacrifice experience but preserves morale.

*Communications with Like Units.* 1-37 FA was able to communicate with units in Iraq before training for deployment. The digital age allows units to “talk” to each other as never before.

Much of the success of the RIP between 1-37 FA and 2-8 FA was due to open communications *at all levels* between the units well before the RIP. Additionally, 2-8 FA had a unique opportunity with support at Fort Lewis to reach into our Army battle command system (ABCS) and see our missions, products, orders, etc. The battalion had the information to plan in detail as well as train for the missions with a greater fidelity.

Although not all units will have this capability, it's essential to use whatever means are available to obtain the real-time information on enemy TTPs, conditions in specific AOs or anything else

pertinent to operations.

*Radar Management.* Although operating as a maneuver unit, TF 1-37 FA consistently managed more than its organic radars (a Q-36 and Q-37) once it moved to Mosul. The radar deployment orders (RDOs) of the six radars in our brigade—four Q-36, one Q-37 and one lightweight countermortar radar (LWCMR)—were developed by the brigade's joint fires and effects cell (JFEC) and the DECOORD.

However, because the TAB and organic radars are under the control of the FA battalion commander, he must ensure a level of oversight and analysis so the counterfire intelligence performs at an adequate level. To ensure the priority areas were covered, we established a detailed plan for conducting maintenance during the periods when the enemy did not routinely fire. Trend analysis also was key to orienting the right radars at the right time as well as allowing the brigade to focus on specific areas and times to patrol. Finally, a radar “play book” was developed with plans to execute if any one or more radars went down due to attacks or unexpected repair requirements.

*Maneuver Lessons.* These are lessons I learned while serving as a maneuver commander.

*Tactical Patience—Allowing Subordinates to Develop the Situation.* This was challenging and only came with experience while conducting many operations. The commander must fight the urge for constant updates during challenging missions. This will allow the men to conduct their tasks with complete focus. When things don't go as planned, reports come fast and steady.

Fewer but better reports come when the commander asks the right questions and allows subordinates to regain situational awareness rather than asking for many reports that are distracting from the most important thing at that moment: the mission.

*Rehearsals.* All operations must be rehearsed—from convoys to cordon and searches. The rehearsal identifies deficiencies and allows leaders to make decisions that mitigate risks at the points of friction or danger. Battle drills for movement, recovery, hasty recovery, contact—all must be rehearsed. Units must maintain a program or SOP regarding rehearsals to ensure complacency is defeated and Soldiers are proficient at the key tasks during an operation.

**Mission Statement:**  
1-37 FA deploys rapidly by land, air or sea to a designated AOR and provides full-spectrum fires in support of the *Arrowhead* BCT. Be prepared to conduct area security operations as part of a brigade economy-of-force mission.

METL: Battalion	Howitzer Battery	HSB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deploy.</li><li>• Conduct counterfire operations.</li><li>• Conduct delivery of fires.</li><li>• Conduct CSS operations.</li><li>• Execute battle command.</li><li>• Be prepared to conduct area security.<sup>1</sup></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deploy.</li><li>• Provide indirect fires.</li><li>• Conduct tactical moves.</li><li>• Defend battery area and materials.</li><li>• Be prepared to establish TCPs.<sup>2</sup></li><li>• Be prepared to conduct cordon and search.<sup>2</sup></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deploy.</li><li>• Perform CSS operations.</li><li>• Conduct tactical moves.</li><li>• Defend battery areas and materials.</li><li>• Prepare for combat.</li><li>• Be prepared to establish TCPs.<sup>2</sup></li></ul>

**Notes:**  
1. To control terrain—does not imply “seize” terrain.    2. Based on experience in Iraq.

**Legend:**  
BCT = Brigade Combat Team      TCPs = Traffic Control Points

Figure 5: 1-37 FA Mission Statement and METL Approved January 2005



It is the detailed rehearsal for offensive operations that allows Soldiers to visualize their physical positioning and actions in relationship to the other Soldiers of the team, squad or platoon. This builds Soldiers' confidence in the plan, enables them to understand their role in accomplishing the mission and empowers them to make smart decisions at their levels.

*Risk, Safety and Leadership.* There are times when a leader needs to "go with his hunch" and stop actions when the conditions are not set to mitigate risk. Operations that a unit plans typically are set to be executed on that unit's planning timeline. Rather than just adhere to a timeline, commanders have to recommend and enforce abort criteria for operations. Leaders must cancel or delay any operation that does not require an immediate response when the conditions have not been met for successful and safe execution.

*Positioning on the Battlefield.* I grew to realize the importance of positioning. This is not a new lesson for seasoned maneuver commanders; however, it was for me. The key was my position needed to be where I best could influence operations. There were times when my position forward with the unit provided more to the fight where I could better understand the situation and apply additional resources, if required.

When multiple and dispersed operations were taking place, as much as I did not like it, the best location for me proved to be in the tactical operations center (TOC) where communications were the best. This allowed me to balance the needs of several units with the added power of the staff.

*Task Organization—Below the Platoon Level.* A key lesson in task organization was simply overcoming the units'/sections' resistance to mixing and matching their capabilities. We do not task organize very often in the Field Artillery—much less below the platoon level. However, when conducting the missions as a task force, our reorganization often occurred below the platoon level. This resulted in more flexible and talented organizations for specific missions. When task organizing at that level, we needed more time for training and rehearsals to build the team.

*Planning for All Assets Available.* The commander and staff had to learn to employ and synchronize multiple brigade assets in support of our own operations. The use of fire support in all



C/52 IN patrolling in the snow in Mosul.

forms (USAF, Army Aviation, howitzers and mortars) won't be lost on any commander who has served as an FSO. However, the inclusion of tactical human intelligence (HUMINT) teams (THTs) and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and the positioning of adjacent units all provided added capabilities and must be included in the staff's mission analysis.

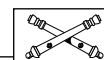
*We can do it!* The greatest lesson I learned was that maneuver skills are learned skills. Redlegs are fully capable of executing Infantry tasks. We are only limited by our time to train, the size of our organizations and the equipment currently issued.

As currently trained, equipped and manned, I am convinced that Artillery battalions are not the choice to seize terrain and that when terrain must be seized, nothing does it better than the combined arms team led by maneuver. However, once that terrain is seized and the larger battles are won, there remains a myriad of maneuver skills required to maintain security. This has been the case in Iraq, and Artillery units have been instrumental in maintaining that security.

**Final Thoughts.** Serving as a maneuver battalion in Iraq was demanding for 1-37 FA. It wasn't easy on the leadership in terms of experience, and it wasn't easy for the Soldiers in terms of initial training. 1-37 FA was successful in Iraq due to the discipline and flexibility of

its Soldiers and leaders at every level. Its ability to grow into missions while in contact proved this. As great as the learning curve was for the unit, its accomplishments were just as great.

Any Soldier or unit in the US Army can accomplish any mission or task with adequate training and resourcing. With foresight, flexibility and a "can-do" mindset, any Artillery unit can achieve outstanding results with any mission in Iraq.



Lieutenant Colonel Steven A. Sliwa, until recently, commanded the 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery (1-37 FA), 3d Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), 2d Infantry Division, at Fort Lewis, Washington. He commanded 1-37 FA during the process of certifying the Army's first SBCT as well as during its yearlong deployment to Iraq. Currently, he is the Assistant G3 for I Corps at Fort Lewis. In his previous assignment, he was a Strategic Planner in the Directorate for Strategy and Policy, J5, Joint Staff, at the Pentagon. Among other assignments, he was the Brigade Fire Support Officer (FSO) for 1st Brigade and Executive Officer (XO) of 3-6 FA, both in the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) at Fort Drum, New York. He participated in Operation Desert Storm in the Gulf with the 3d Armored Division and in Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti with the 25th Infantry Division (Light). He has been selected as a National Security Fellow at the JFK School of Government at Harvard University.